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**Cheng et al.**

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(54) **PERFORMANCE BOOST BY SILICON  
EPITAXY**

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CPC .... **H01L 29/66636** (2013.01); **H01L 29/66666**  
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H01L 29/42368; H01L 21/67069

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257/E21.423, E21.435, E21.449, E21.545,  
257/E21.547, E21.632

See application file for complete search history.

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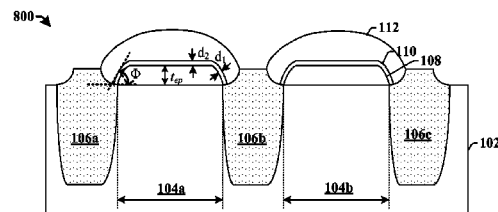
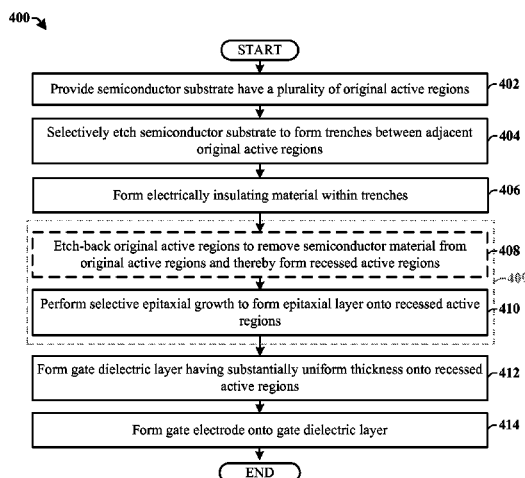
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LLC

(57) **ABSTRACT**

The present disclosure relates to a method of generating a  
transistor device having an epitaxial layer disposed over a  
recessed active region. The epitaxial layer improves transistor  
device performance. In some embodiments, the method is  
performed by providing a semiconductor substrate. An epi-  
taxial growth is performed to form an epitaxial layer onto the  
semiconductor substrate. An electrically insulating layer is  
then formed onto the epitaxial layer, and a gate structure is  
formed onto the electrically insulating layer. By forming the  
epitaxial layer over the semiconductor substrate the surface  
roughness of the semiconductor substrate is improved,  
thereby improving transistor device performance.

**20 Claims, 9 Drawing Sheets**



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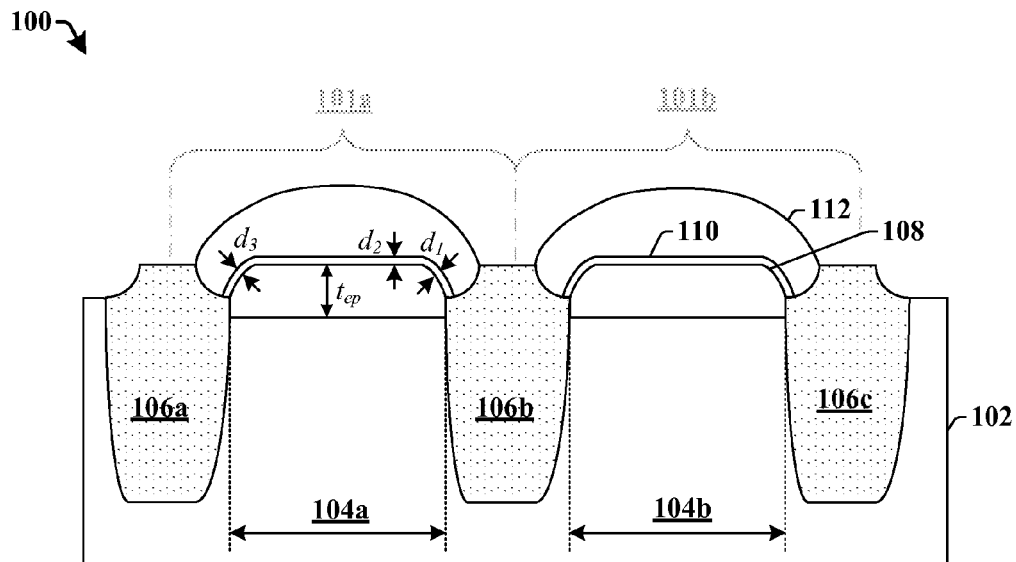


Fig. 1A

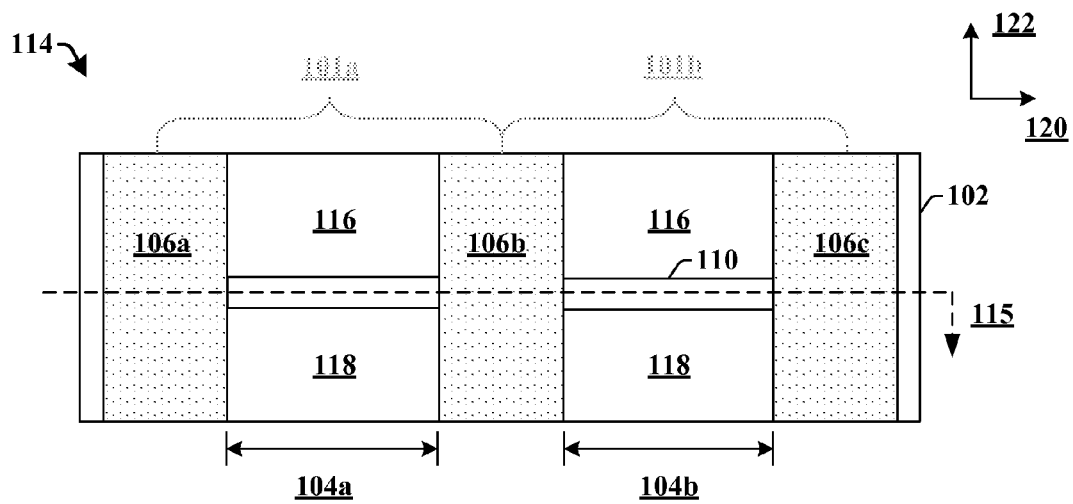


Fig. 1B

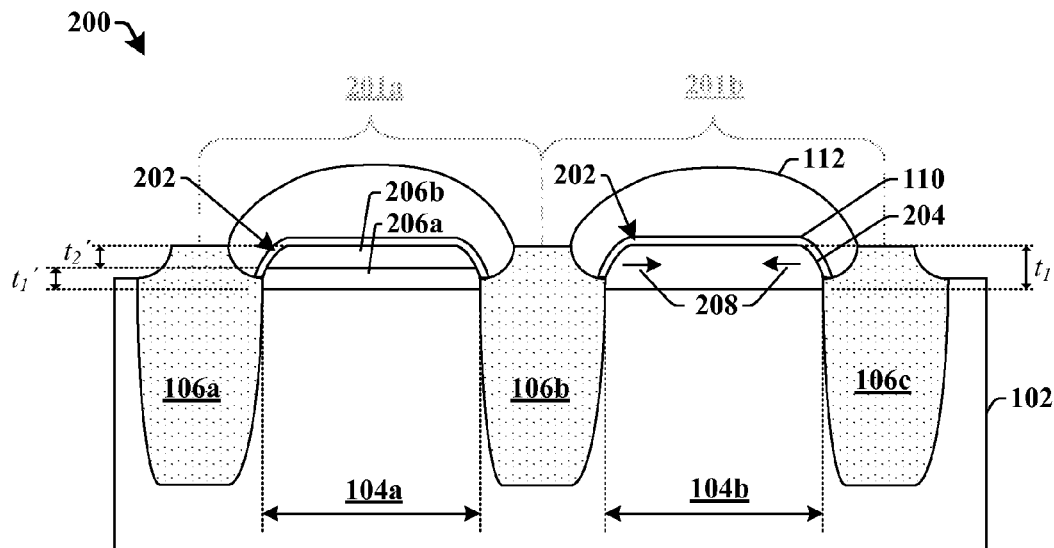


Fig. 2

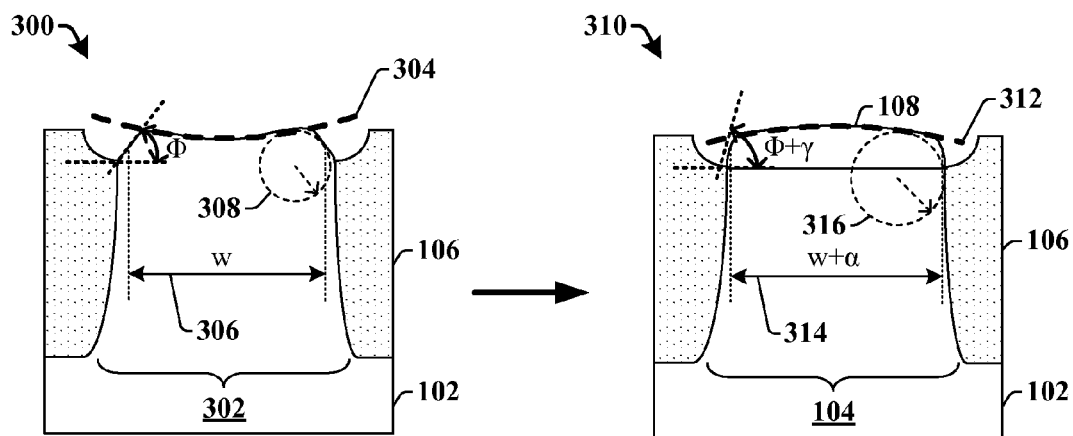
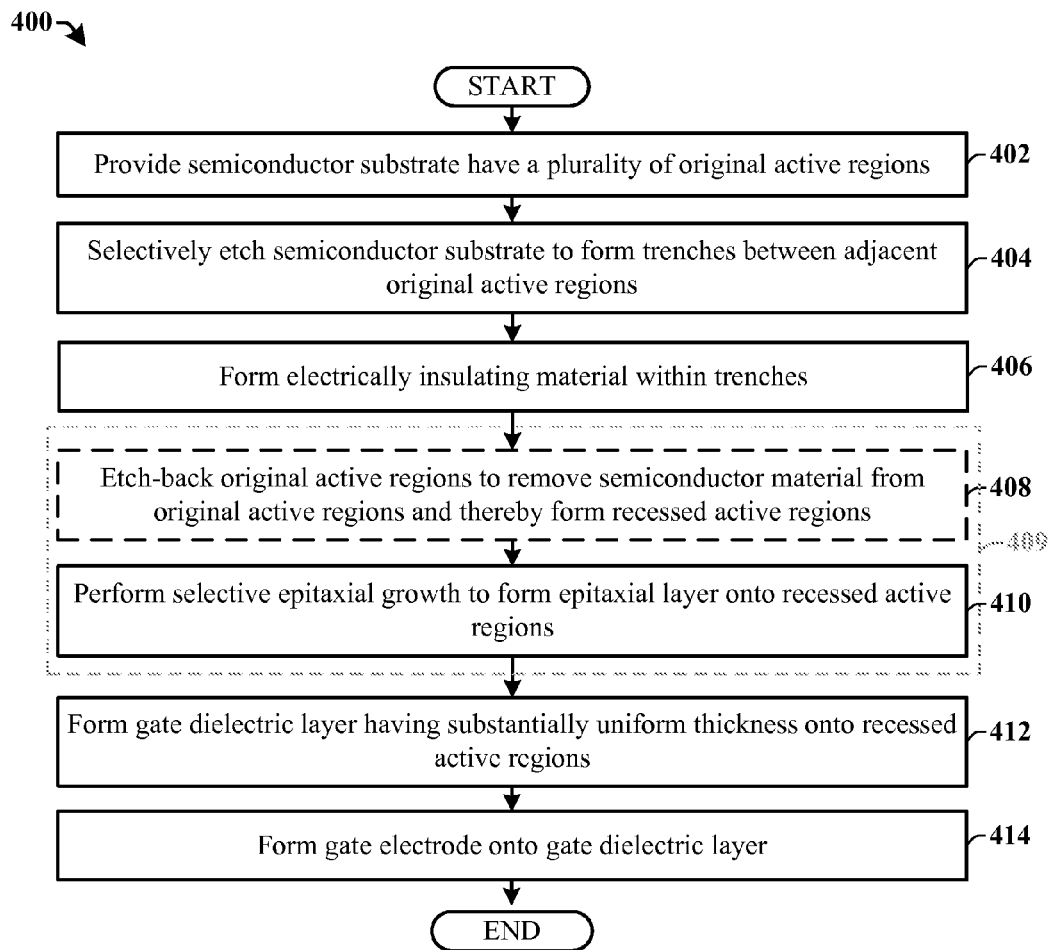
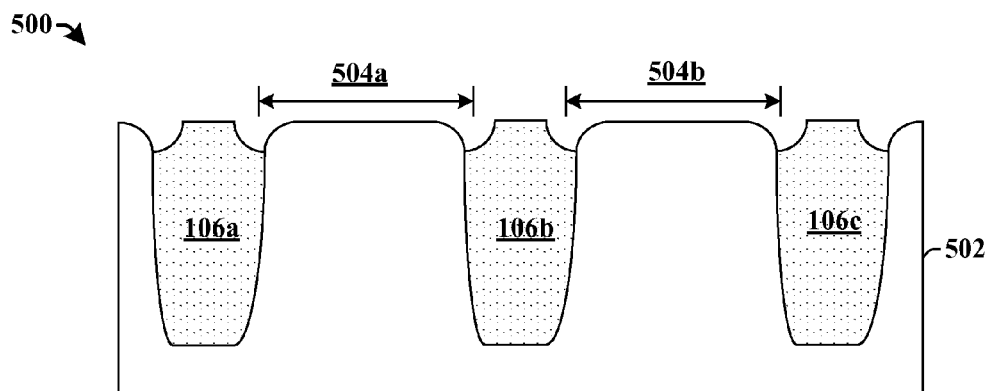


Fig. 3

**Fig. 4****Fig. 5**

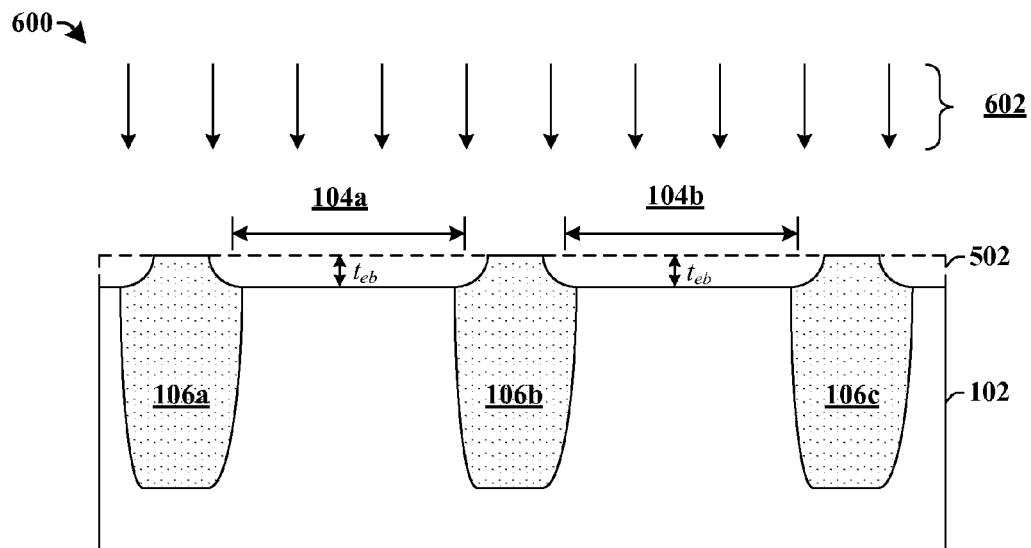


Fig. 6

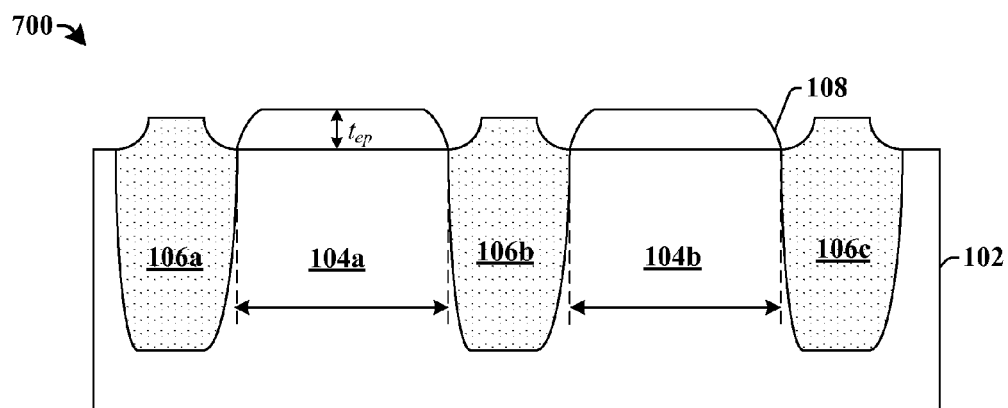


Fig. 7

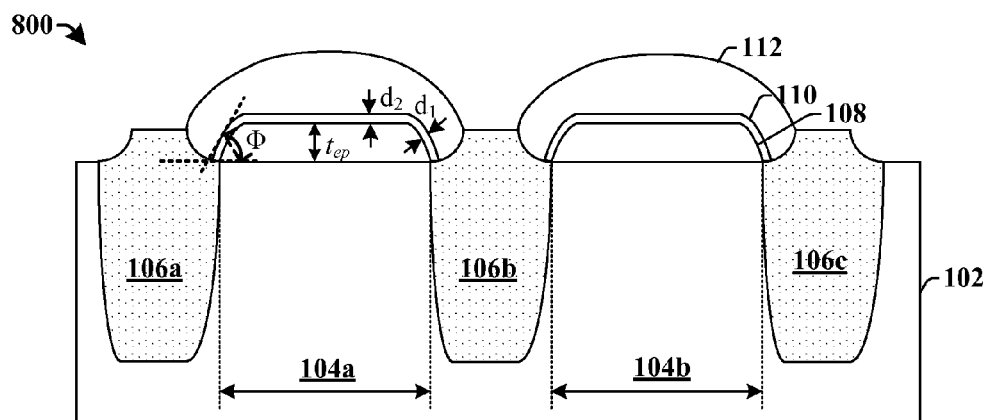


Fig. 8

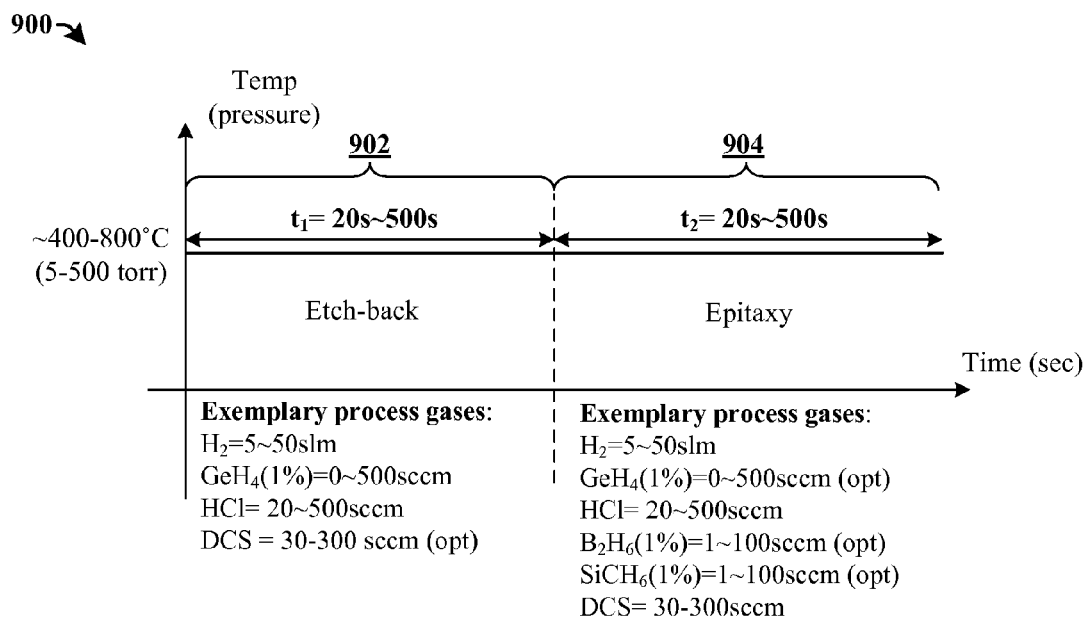


Fig. 9

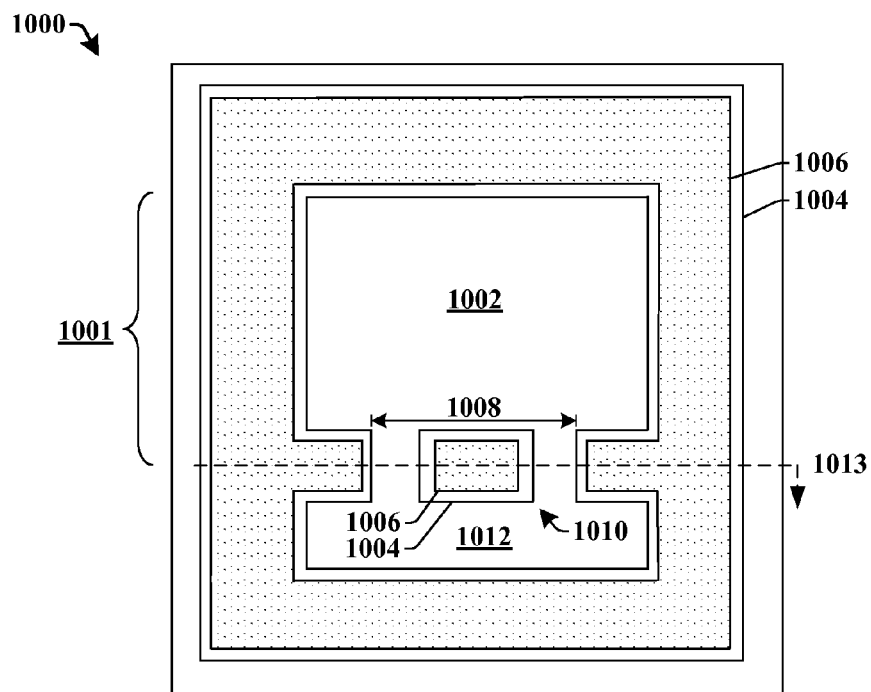


Fig. 10A

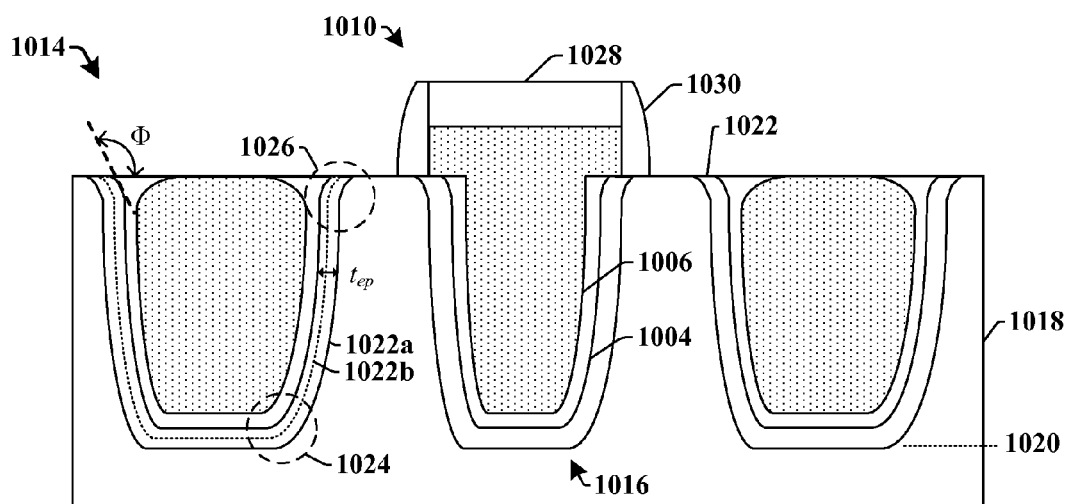
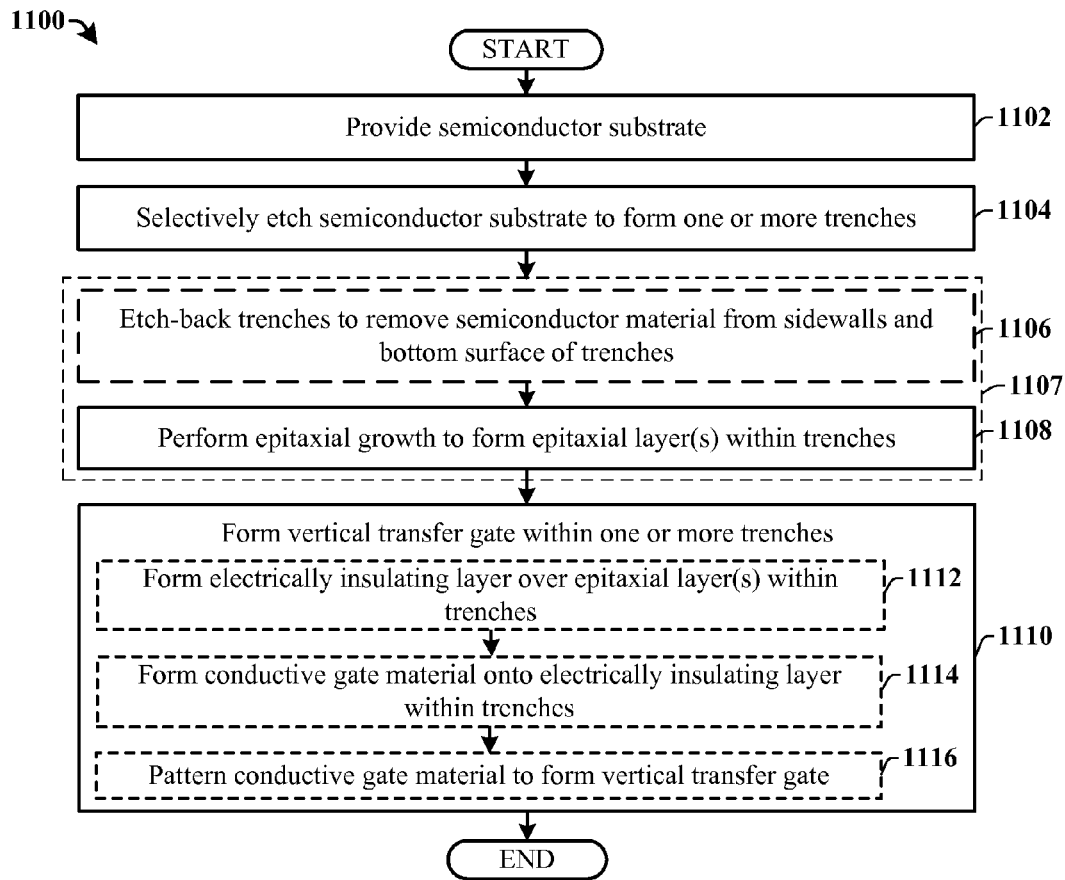
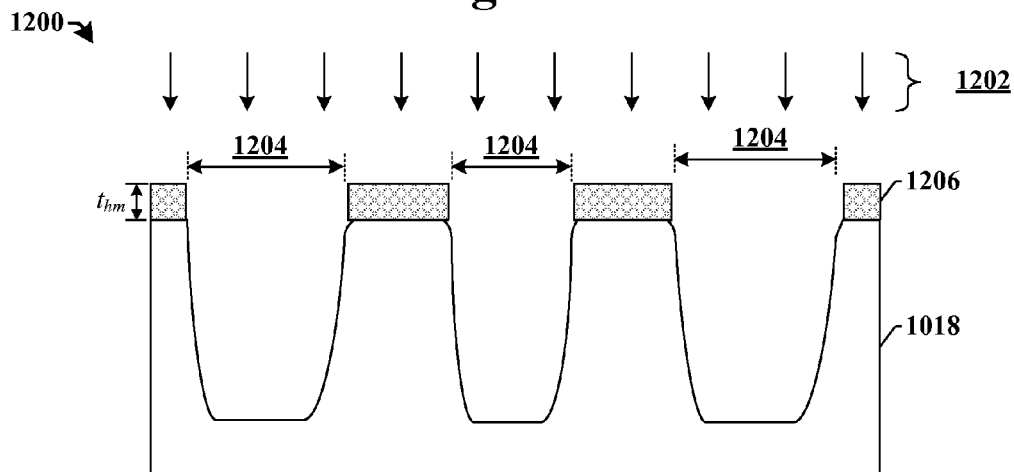


Fig. 10B



**Fig. 11****Fig. 12**

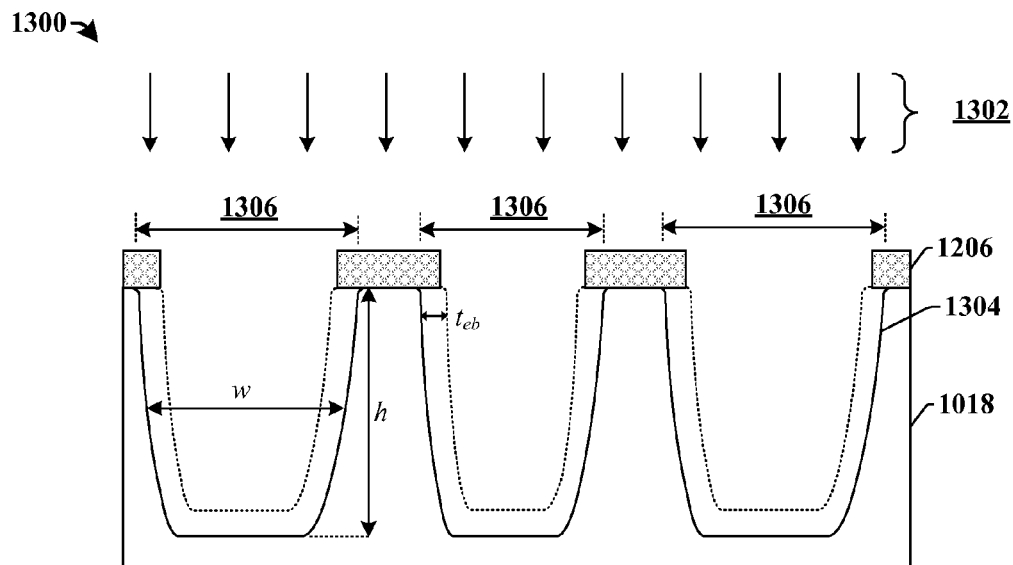


Fig. 13

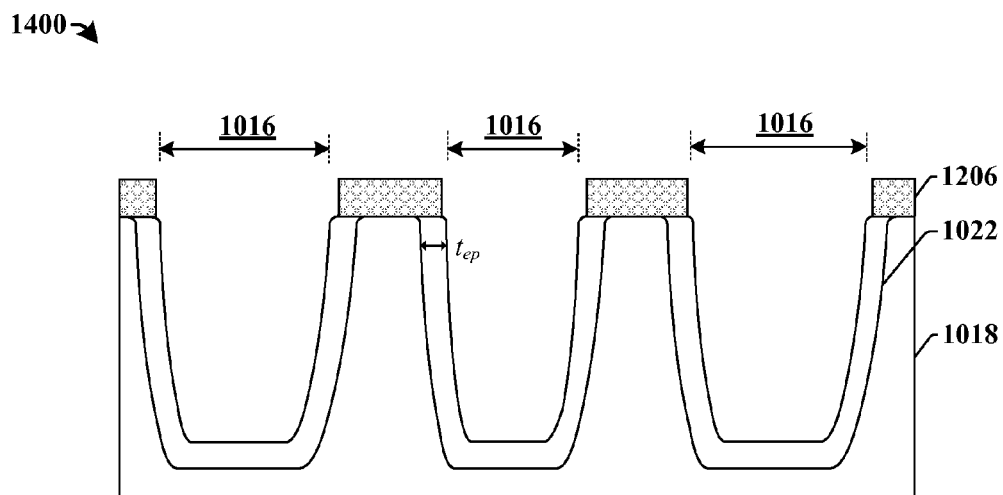
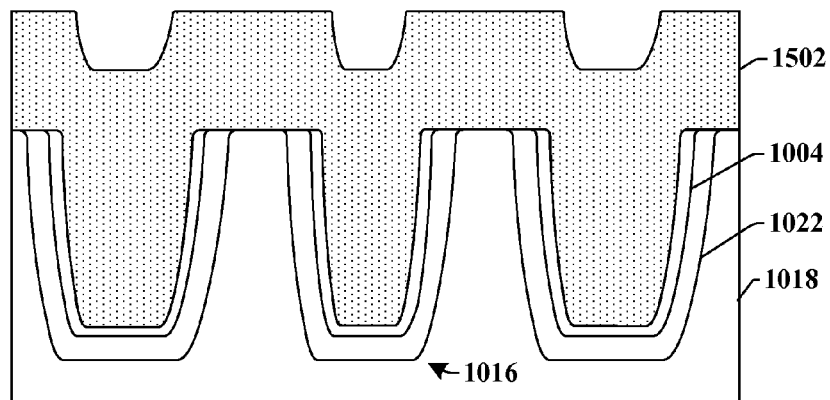


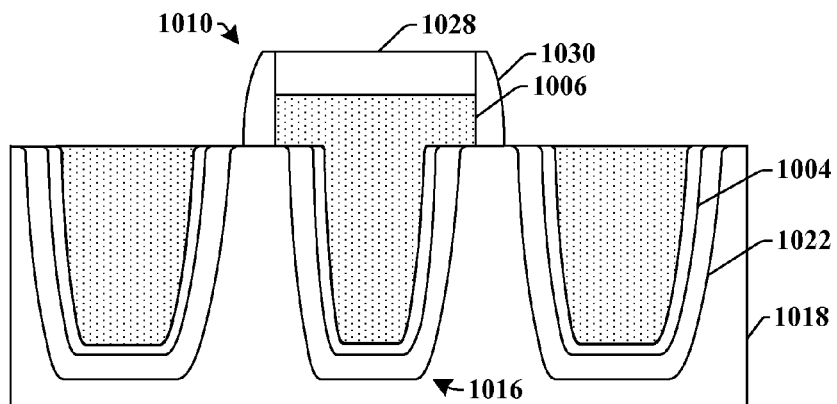
Fig. 14

1500 ↘



**Fig. 15**

1600 ↘



**Fig. 16**

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# PERFORMANCE BOOST BY SILICON EPITAXY

## BACKGROUND

Complementary metal-oxide-semiconductor (CMOS) transistor devices are the building blocks of modern day integrated chips. CMOS transistor devices use local oxidation to attain a planar topology that lends itself to easy metal interconnect coverage and high device density, thereby allowing for a large number of CMOS transistor devices to be connected together on a same integrated chip. By interconnecting a large number of CMOS transistor devices together, an integrated chip can be formed to implement increasingly complex functionalities.

## BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Aspects of the present disclosure are best understood from the following detailed description when read with the accompanying figures. It is noted that, in accordance with the standard practice in the industry, various features are not drawn to scale. In fact, the dimensions of the various features may be arbitrarily increased or reduced for clarity of discussion.

FIGS. 1A-1B illustrate the cross-sectional and top views, respectively, of transistor devices having an epitaxial layer disposed between an underlying recessed active region and an overlying gate dielectric layer in accordance with some embodiments of the disclosure.

FIG. 2 illustrates a cross-sectional view of some alternative embodiments of transistor devices having an epitaxial layer disposed between an underlying recessed active region and an overlying gate dielectric layer.

FIG. 3 illustrates a cross-sectional view of a transistor device having a non-recessed active region and a cross-sectional view of a transistor device having an epitaxial layer disposed over a recessed active region, in accordance with some embodiments of the disclosure.

FIG. 4 illustrates a method of forming a transistor device having an epitaxial layer disposed between an underlying recessed active region and an overlying gate dielectric layer in accordance with some embodiments of the disclosure.

FIGS. 5-8 illustrate cross-sectional views of various stages of forming a transistor device in accordance with some embodiments of the disclosure.

FIG. 9 illustrates a timing diagram corresponding to a method of forming a transistor device in accordance with some embodiments of the disclosure.

FIGS. 10A-10B illustrate some embodiments of a transfer transistor having a vertical transfer gate.

FIG. 11 illustrates a method of forming a CIS (CMOS image sensor) pixel comprising a transistor device having an epitaxial layer disposed between vertical transfer gates.

FIGS. 12-16 illustrate cross-sectional views of various stages of forming a CIS pixel having a transistor device with a vertical transfer gate in accordance with some embodiments of the disclosure.

## DETAILED DESCRIPTION

The following disclosure provides many different embodiments, or examples, for implementing different features of the provided subject matter. Specific examples of components and arrangements are described below to simplify the present disclosure. These are, of course, merely examples and are not intended to be limiting. For example, the formation of a first feature over or on a second feature in the description

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that follows may include embodiments in which the first and second features are formed in direct contact, and may also include embodiments in which additional features may be formed between the first and second features, such that the first and second features may not be in direct contact. In addition, the present disclosure may repeat reference numerals and/or letters in the various examples. This repetition is for the purpose of simplicity and clarity and does not in itself dictate a relationship between the various embodiments and/or configurations discussed.

Further, spatially relative terms, such as “beneath,” “below,” “lower,” “above,” “upper” and the like, may be used herein for ease of description to describe one element or feature’s relationship to another element(s) or feature(s) as illustrated in the figures. The spatially relative terms are intended to encompass different orientations of the device in use or operation in addition to the orientation depicted in the figures. The apparatus may be otherwise oriented (rotated 90 degrees or at other orientations) and the spatially relative descriptors used herein may likewise be interpreted accordingly.

A complementary metal-oxide-semiconductor (CMOS) transistor may be built by forming a plurality of doped active regions within a semiconductor substrate. The active regions are separated from one another by isolation structures that provide for electrical isolation. A gate dielectric layer is formed on top of an active region at a position separating source and drain regions disposed within the active region. A gate electrode is subsequently formed over the gate dielectric layer. The gate electrode, separated from the active region by the gate dielectric layer, is configured to control the flow charge carriers between the source and drain regions.

As the size of CMOS transistors has decreased due to scaling, it has been appreciated that a number of processing issues may arise along the corners of the active regions abutting the isolation structures. For example, the oxide etch rate at corners of the isolation structures is faster than that at a center of an active region, leading to thinning of the gate dielectric layer at isolation structure corners. The thinning of gate dielectric layer adversely affects the gate oxide integrity (GOI) as the thinner region experiences a higher electric field for a same applied gate voltage. Furthermore, it is hard to control the active region corner rounding and profiles, thereby allowing bulk dopants (e.g., boron) to diffuse into the active region and cause a threshold voltage variation.

Accordingly, the present disclosure relates to a method, and an associated apparatus, of generating a transistor device having an epitaxial layer disposed over a recessed active region. The epitaxial layer is configured to improve transistor device performance. In some embodiments, the method is performed by providing a semiconductor substrate having a plurality of original active regions. The semiconductor substrate is selectively etched to form a plurality of trenches that extend into the semiconductor substrate between the original active regions. The original active regions are etched back to remove a portion of the original active regions and thereby form recessed active regions. An epitaxial growth is then performed in-situ after the etch back to form an epitaxial layer on the recessed active regions. The epitaxial layer offers a number of advantages that improve transistor device performance including an enlarged effective width and an overlying dielectric layer with a uniform thickness.

FIG. 1A illustrates some embodiments of a cross-sectional view **100** (along line **115** of FIG. 1B) of disclosed transistor devices **101a**, **101b** having an epitaxial layer **108** disposed between an underlying recessed active region **104** and an

overlying gate dielectric layer **110**. FIG. 1B illustrates some embodiments of a top-view **114** of the disclosed transistor device.

As shown in cross-sectional view **100**, the transistor devices **101a**, **101b** comprise recessed active regions **104a**, **104b** disposed within a semiconductor substrate **102**. In various embodiments, the semiconductor substrate **102** may comprise any type of semiconductor body (e.g., silicon, silicon-germanium, silicon-on-insulator, III-V materials, etc.) such as a semiconductor wafer and/or one or more die on a semiconductor wafer, as well as any other type of semiconductor and/or epitaxial layers associated therewith. The recessed active regions **104a**, **104b** are regions of semiconductor material that are doped opposite that of a surrounding region (e.g., a well region) of the semiconductor substrate **102**.

As shown in top-view **114**, the recessed active regions **104a**, **104b** comprise a source region **116** and a drain region **118**. In some embodiments, the transistor devices **101a**, **101b** may comprise an NMOS transistor having source and drain regions, **116** and **118**, comprising an n-type material disposed within a p-type semiconductor substrate. In other embodiments, the transistor devices **101a**, **101b** may comprise a PMOS transistor having source and drain regions, **116** and **118**, comprising a p-type material disposed within an n-type semiconductor substrate.

A plurality of isolation structures **106a-106c** are disposed within the semiconductor substrate **102** at positions that separate the semiconductor substrate **102** into alternating isolation structures **106** and active regions **104**. The recessed active regions **104a**, **104b** have a top surface that is below the surrounding isolation structures **106a-106c**. The isolation structures **106a-106c** are configured to prevent current leakage between transistor devices **101a**, **101b** formed in adjacent recessed active regions **104**. In some embodiments, the isolation structures **106a-106c** comprise shallow trench isolation (STI) structures having a dielectric material disposed within a trench in the semiconductor substrate **102**.

An epitaxial layer **108** is disposed over the recessed active regions **104a**, **104b**. The epitaxial layer **108** is positioned between adjacent isolation structures (e.g., **106a** and **106b**) in a first lateral direction **120** and comprises a channel region that extends between the source region **116** and the drain region **118** in a perpendicular, second lateral direction **122**. In some embodiments, the epitaxial layer **108** is doped with a dopant, such as a boron dopant, a phosphorus dopant, or a carbon dopant. In some embodiments, the epitaxial layer **108** may have a thickness  $t_{ep}$  that is in a range of between approximately 3 nm and approximately 30 nm.

A gate dielectric layer **110** is disposed over the epitaxial layer **108**. In some embodiments, the gate dielectric layer **110** has a substantially uniform thickness over the epitaxial layer **108**. For example, in some embodiments, the gate dielectric layer **110** may have a first thickness  $d_1$  at a first position, a second thickness  $d_2$  at a second position, and a third thickness  $d_3$  at a third position, wherein  $d_1 \approx d_2 \approx d_3$ . The substantially uniform thickness of the gate dielectric layer **110** at the corners of the isolation structures **106** may improve tailing of a break-down voltage ( $V_{bd}$ ) and/or a gate current ( $I_{gi}$ ).

A gate electrode **112** is disposed at a position overlying the gate dielectric layer **110**. The gate electrode **112** is configured to control the flow of charge carriers (e.g., electrons and/or holes) within the channel region of the epitaxial layer **108** extending between the source region **116** and the drain region **118**. In some embodiments, the gate electrode **112** may comprise a poly-silicon gate electrode overlying the gate dielectric layer **110**. In other embodiments, the gate electrode **112**

may comprise a metal gate electrode (e.g., an aluminum gate electrode) overlying the gate dielectric layer **110**.

FIG. 2 illustrates some alternative embodiments of a cross-sectional view **200** of transistor devices **201a**, **201b** having an epitaxial layer **202** disposed between an underlying recessed active region **104** and an overlying gate dielectric layer **110**.

The epitaxial layer **202** has a compressive stress **208** that pushes inward on the epitaxial layer. The compressive stress **208** acts upon a channel region of the transistor devices **201a**, **201b**, thereby improving the performance of transistor devices **201a**, **201b** comprising PMOS transistor devices. For example, the compressive stress **208** may improve the mobility of PMOS transistor devices, thereby increasing the drain-source current  $I_{DS}$  (since  $I_{DS} = \frac{1}{2} \mu \cdot C_{ox} \cdot (W/L) (V_{GS} - V_t)^2$ ).

In some embodiments, the epitaxial layer **202** may comprise a single-layer epitaxial layer **204**. For example, transistor device **201b** comprises a single layer epitaxial layer **204**. The single layer epitaxial layer **204** may comprise a layer of pure silicon epitaxially grown onto the semiconductor substrate **102**. In some embodiments, the layer of pure silicon may have a thickness  $t_1$  in a range of between approximately 3 nm and approximately 20 nm. In some embodiments, the layer of pure silicon may comprise a doped layer of silicon (e.g., having a p-type or n-type dopant concentration of between  $1E18 \text{ cm}^{-3}$  and  $1E21 \text{ cm}^{-3}$ ). In some embodiments, the single layer epitaxial layer **204** may comprise an additional semiconductor material such as germanium, for example.

In other embodiments, the epitaxial layer **202** may comprise a bi-layer epitaxial layer comprising a two epitaxial layers with different doping concentrations. For example, transistor device **201a** comprises a bi-layer epitaxial layer with a first epitaxial layer **206a** and a second epitaxial layer **206b**. In some embodiments, the bi-layer epitaxial layer **206** may comprise a silicon cap layer **206a** and an overlying doped silicon layer **206b**. The silicon cap layer **206a** may comprise an un-doped silicon layer, having a first thickness  $t_1'$ , which is disposed onto the active region **104**. In some embodiments, the first thickness  $t_1'$  may have a range of between approximately 3 nm and approximately 5 nm. The doped silicon layer **206b** is disposed onto the silicon cap layer **206a** and has a second thickness  $t_2'$  greater than the first thickness  $t_1'$ . In some embodiments, the second thickness  $t_2'$  may have a range of between approximately 10 nm and approximately 20 nm. The doped silicon layer **206b** may have a doping concentration of a boron or carbon doping having a range of between approximately  $1E18 \text{ cm}^{-3}$  and approximately  $1E21 \text{ cm}^{-3}$ .

Although the epitaxial layer **202** is illustrated in cross-sectional view **200** as a single layer epitaxial layer **204** and/or a bi-layer epitaxial layer **206**, it will be appreciated that the disclosed epitaxial layer **202** is not limited to such layers. In other embodiments, the epitaxial layer **202** may comprise a multi-layer epitaxial layer (e.g., a tri-layer epitaxial layer, a quad layer epitaxial layer, etc.) having a plurality of epitaxial layers with different doping concentrations. In some embodiments, the epitaxial layer **202** may comprise a gradient doping concentration that increases or decreases as a function of a distance from a top surface of the epitaxial layer **202**.

FIG. 3 illustrates a cross-sectional view **300** of a transistor device having a non-recessed active region **302** and a cross-sectional view **310** of a transistor device having an epitaxial layer **108** disposed over a recessed active region **104**, in accordance with some embodiments of the disclosure.

As shown in cross-sectional view **300**, the non-recessed active region **302** has a concave curvature (extending along concave line **304**) having a top surface that is higher at the

outer edges of the non-recessed active region **302** and lower at a center of the non-recessed active region **302**. Side surfaces of the non-recessed active region **302** have a sidewall angle  $\Phi$  that is approximately  $30^\circ$  with respect to a horizontal plane. The non-recessed active region **302** has corners located between the side surfaces and a top surface of the non-recessed active region **302**. The corners have a corner rounding radius **308**.

As shown in cross-sectional view **310**, the epitaxial layer **108** has a convex curvature (extending along convex line **312**) having a top surface that is higher at a center of the epitaxial layer **108** and lower at the outer edges of the epitaxial layer **108**. The convex curvature is due to the compressive stress (e.g., **208** in FIG. 2) on the epitaxial layer **108**, which pushes the epitaxial layer **108** inward (and therefore pushes the center of the epitaxial layer **108** to a greater height than the outer edges of the epitaxial layer **108**).

The epitaxial layer **108** has corners located between the side and top surfaces of the epitaxial layer **108**. The corners have a corner rounding radius **316** that is greater than the corner rounding radius **308**. For example, an active region may experience an increase in corner rounding having a value of between approximately 5% and approximately 30% of the width of the active region. The larger corner rounding radius causes an increase in the effective channel-width (e.g., by between approximately 10% to approximately 30%), which improves device performance (e.g., source-drain current,  $I_{ds}$ ).

The side surfaces of the epitaxial layer **108** have a sidewall angle  $\Phi+\gamma$  that is greater than approximately  $30^\circ$  with respect to a horizontal plane. For example, in some embodiments, the epitaxial layer **108** at an angle that is equal to approximately  $54.7^\circ$  (i.e., a (111) facet) with respect to a horizontal plane along a top of an isolation structure **106**. The larger sidewall angle improves the uniformity of an overlying gate dielectric layer, since the larger sidewall angle decreases thinning of the gate dielectric layer due to subsequent etching processes.

FIG. 4 illustrates a method **400** of forming a transistor device having an epitaxial layer disposed between an underlying recessed active region and an overlying gate dielectric layer in accordance with some embodiments of the disclosure.

While disclosed methods (e.g., **400** and/or **1000**) are illustrated and described below as a series of acts or events, it will be appreciated that the illustrated ordering of such acts or events are not to be interpreted in a limiting sense. For example, some acts may occur in different orders and/or concurrently with other acts or events apart from those illustrated and/or described herein. In addition, not all illustrated acts may be required to implement one or more aspects or embodiments of the description herein. Further, one or more of the acts depicted herein may be carried out in one or more separate acts and/or phases.

At **402**, a semiconductor substrate having a plurality of original active regions is provided. The original active regions comprise source and drain regions that are doped opposite that of a body region or a well region in a surrounding semiconductor substrate.

At **404**, the semiconductor substrate is selectively etched to form trenches between adjacent original active regions. In some embodiments, the semiconductor substrate may be etched according to a hard mask disposed over the semiconductor substrate.

At **406**, the trenches are filled with an electrically insulating material to form an isolation structure between adjacent original active regions. The isolation structure (e.g., STI) is

configured to electrically isolate adjacent original active regions so that they do not interfere with each others' operations.

At **408**, the original active regions may be etched back to remove a top portion of the original active region and thereby form recessed active regions. In some embodiments, the etch back process may be performed by a plasma etching process. The resulting recessed active regions have a top surface that is below the surrounding isolation structures.

At **410**, a selective epitaxial growth is performed to form an epitaxial layer onto the recessed active regions. The epitaxial layer may be grown onto the recessed active regions by way of a deposition technique (e.g., chemical vapor deposition). For example, in some embodiments, the epitaxial layer may be formed by a LPVCD (low-pressure chemical vapor deposition) process. In other embodiments, the epitaxial layer may be formed by an APCVD (atmospheric pressure chemical vapor deposition) process.

In various embodiments, the epitaxial layer may comprise a single-layer epitaxial layer or bi-layer epitaxial layer. The single layer epitaxial layer may comprise a layer of pure silicon epitaxially grown onto the recessed active regions. The bi-layer epitaxial layer comprises an un-doped silicon cap layer grown onto the recessed active regions and a doped silicon layer grown onto the un-doped silicon cap layer. The doped silicon layer may have a doping concentration of a boron, a phosphorus, or carbon doping having a range of between approximately  $1E18\text{ cm}^{-3}$  and approximately  $1E21\text{ cm}^{-3}$ .

In some embodiments, the etch back process (act **408**) and the epitaxial growth process (act **410**) are performed in-situ (as shown by box **409**), within a same processing chamber (i.e., without removing the semiconductor substrate from the processing chamber).

At **412**, a gate dielectric layer is formed over the epitaxial layer.

At **414**, a gate electrode is formed over the gate dielectric layer.

FIGS. 5-8 illustrate cross-sectional views of various stages of forming a transistor device in accordance with some embodiments of the disclosure. Although FIGS. 5-8 are described in relation to method **400**, it will be appreciated that the structures disclosed in FIGS. 5-8 are not limited to such a method.

FIG. 5 illustrates a cross-sectional view **500** of some embodiments of a semiconductor substrate corresponding to acts **402-404**.

As shown in cross-sectional view **500**, a plurality of isolation structures **106a-106c** are formed in the semiconductor substrate **502** at positions that separate adjacent original active regions **504a**, **504b**. In some embodiments, the isolation structures **106a-106c** may comprise a shallow trench isolation (STI) regions. The STI regions may be formed by selectively etching a shallow trench within the semiconductor substrate **502** at positions between adjacent original active regions **504a**, **504b**. The shallow trench is subsequently filled with a dielectric material to provide electrical isolation between the adjacent original active regions **504a**, **504b**. The semiconductor substrate **502** may be planarized after formation of the isolation structures **106a-106c** to remove excess dielectric material from a surface of the semiconductor substrate **502**.

In some embodiments, the dielectric material may comprise silicon dioxide ( $\text{SiO}_2$ ). In other embodiments, the dielectric material may comprise such materials as  $\text{ZrO}_2$ ,  $\text{Al}_2\text{O}_3$ , high density plasma (HDP) oxide, or combinations thereof. In some embodiments, a high temperature anneal

may be performed to increase the density of the dielectric material within the isolation structures **106a-106c**.

FIG. 6 illustrates a cross-sectional view **600** of some embodiments of a substrate corresponding to act **406**.

As shown in cross-sectional view **600**, the semiconductor substrate **102** is exposed to an etchant **602** that removes a portion of the original active regions **504a, 504b** (i.e., etches back the original active regions **504a, 504b**) to form recessed active regions **104a, 104b**. The etch-back process removes unwanted topographical features from the surface of the original active regions **504a, 504b**. The etch-back process may use an etchant **602** having a selectivity that removes a portion of the original active regions without changing corner profiles of the isolation structures **106a-106c** (e.g., STI regions). Since a high surface roughness of the original active regions **504a, 504b** may adversely affect a thickness of an overlying gate dielectric layer, etching back the original active regions **504a, 504b** and growing the epitaxial layer in its place (act **408**) can reduce the surface roughness (e.g., a haze value can be reduced by between 0% and 50%).

In some embodiments, the etchant **602** may comprise a plasma etchant formed using processing gases comprising a hydrogen ( $H_2$ ) gas and a hydrochloric acid (HCl) gas. In some additional embodiments, the etchant **602** may further use a processing gas mixture having 1% germane ( $GeH_4$ ) and 99%  $H_2$  gases to enhance the etching rate of the etchant **602**. In some embodiments, the portion of the original active regions **504a, 504b** removed may have a thickness  $t_{eb}$  having a range of between approximately 5 nm and approximately 10 nm.

FIG. 7 illustrates a cross-sectional view **700** of some embodiments of a substrate corresponding to act **408**.

As shown in cross-sectional view **700**, an epitaxial layer **108** is formed onto the recessed active regions **104a, 104b**. The epitaxial layer **108** is grown using a selective epitaxial growth process that forms the epitaxial layer **108** at a position between the isolation structures **106a-106c**. In other words, the selective epitaxial growth process forms the epitaxial layer **108** onto the recessed active regions **104a, 104b**, but does not form the epitaxial layer **108** onto the isolation structures **106a-106c** (e.g., the STI regions). For example, in some embodiments, the epitaxial layer **108** may be grown by an epitaxial growth process that uses processing gases comprising a hydrogen ( $H_2$ ) gas and a hydrochloric acid (HCl) gas. Such processing gases will act to prevent formation of the epitaxial layer **108** on the isolation structures **106a-106c**, while allowing for the formation of the epitaxial layer **108** on the active regions **104a, 104b**.

In some embodiments, the epitaxial layer **108** is grown to a height  $t_{ep}$  that is greater than a height  $t_{eb}$  of the etch back (act **406**). For example, in some embodiments, the etch back may remove 5 nm of the original active regions **504a, 504b**, while the subsequent epitaxial growth may form an epitaxial layer **108** comprising 5 nm of pure epitaxial silicon onto the recessed active regions **104a, 104b**. In other embodiments, the epitaxial layer may be grown to a height that is larger or smaller than a height  $t_{eb}$  of the etch back.

FIG. 8 illustrates a cross-sectional view **800** of some embodiments of a substrate corresponding to act **410**.

As shown in cross-sectional view **800**, a gate dielectric layer **110** having a substantially uniform thickness is formed over the epitaxial layer **108**. In some embodiments, the gate dielectric layer **110** is deposited onto sidewalls of the epitaxial layer **108** at an angle  $\Phi$  that is greater than  $30^\circ$  with respect to a horizontal plane. In some embodiments, the angle  $\Phi$  may comprise a normal silicon (111) facet of  $54.7^\circ$  with respect to a horizontal plane. A gate electrode **112**, configured to control the flow of charge carriers within a channel region

in the epitaxial layer **108** extending between the source region **116** and the drain region **118**, is subsequently formed at a position overlying the gate dielectric layer **110**.

In some embodiments, the gate electrode **112** may comprise a polysilicon gate. The polysilicon gate may be formed by selectively depositing polysilicon on a surface of the semiconductor substrate between the source and drain regions. In some embodiments, the polysilicon may be deposited using a chemical vapor deposition technique (e.g., LPCVD). In some embodiments, selectively portions of the deposited polysilicon material may be subsequently removed according to a masking layer.

FIG. 9 illustrates a timing diagram **900** corresponding to a method of forming a transistor device (e.g., method **400**), having an epitaxial layer disposed between an underlying recessed active region and an overlying gate dielectric layer, in accordance with some embodiments of the disclosure.

As shown in timing diagram **900**, a first processing step **902** is performed to etch back a portion of an original active region of a semiconductor substrate to form a recessed active region. The etch back process is performed within a processing chamber held at a temperature in a range of between approximately  $400^\circ C$ . and approximately  $800^\circ C$ . and at a pressure having a range of between approximately 5 torr and approximately 500 torr. In some embodiments, the etch back process may use processing gases comprising a hydrogen ( $H_2$ ) gas and a hydrochloric acid (HCl) gas. In some additional embodiments, the etch back process may use a processing gas comprising a germane ( $GeH_4$ ) gas or DCS (dichlorosilane).

In some embodiments, the  $H_2$  gas may be introduced into the processing chamber at a flow rate having a range of between approximately 5 and approximately 50 slm (standard liter per minute). In some embodiments, the  $GeH_4$  (1%) gas may be introduced into the processing chamber at a flow rate having a range of between approximately 0 sccm and approximately 500 sccm (standard cubic centimeter per minute). In some embodiments, the HCl gas may be introduced into the processing chamber at a flow rate having a range of between approximately 20 sccm and approximately 500 sccm.

As shown in timing diagram **900**, a subsequent second processing **904** step is performed to selectively grow an epitaxial layer on the recessed active region. In various embodiments, the epitaxial layer may comprise an un-doped silicon epitaxial layer and/or a doped silicon epitaxial layer. In some embodiments, the epitaxial layer may be formed using a multi-step epitaxial process to form a multi-layer epitaxial layer having a silicon cap layer and an overlying silicon boron (SiB) layer.

In some embodiments, the selective epitaxial growth process may use processing gases comprising a hydrogen ( $H_2$ ) gas, dichloro-silane (DCS) a germane ( $GeH_4$ ) gas, and/or a hydrochloric acid (HCl) gas. In some embodiments, the  $H_2$  gas may be introduced into the processing chamber at a flow rate having a range of between approximately 5 slm and approximately 50 slm. In some embodiments, the  $GeH_4$  (1%) gas may be introduced into the processing chamber at a flow rate having a range of between approximately 0 sccm and approximately 500 sccm. In some embodiments, the DCS gas may be introduced into the processing chamber at a flow rate having a range of between approximately 30 sccm and approximately 300 sccm. In other embodiments, silane ( $SiH_4$ ), disilane ( $Si_2H_6$ ) or trisilane ( $Si_3H_8$ ) may be used as a Silicone precursor. In some embodiments, the HCl gas may be introduced into the processing chamber at a flow rate having a range of between approximately 20 sccm and approximately 500 sccm.

In some embodiments, wherein a doped epitaxial layer is formed, additional processing gases may also be used to introduce a doping into the epitaxial layer. For example, in some embodiments, the epitaxial growth process may use processing gases comprising a boron source gas such as diborane  $B_2H_6$  and/or a carbon source gas such as  $SiH_3CH_3$ . In some embodiments,  $B_2H_6$  gas may be introduced into the processing chamber at a flow rate having a range of between approximately 1 sccm and approximately 100 sccm. In some embodiments,  $SiH_3CH_3$  gas may be introduced into the processing chamber at a flow rate having a range of between approximately 1 sccm and approximately 100 sccm.

In some embodiments, the first processing step **902** (etch back process) and the second processing step **904** (selective epitaxial growth process) may be performed at a same temperature and pressure. For example, the first processing step **902** and the second processing step **904** may be performed within a processing chamber held at a temperature in a range of between approximately  $400^\circ C.$  and approximately  $800^\circ C.$  and at a pressure having a range of between approximately 5 torr and approximately 500 torr.

In various embodiments, the provided subject matter may be applied to planner logic CMOS devices, Fin-FET logic devices, and/or embedded flash, DRAM, MEMS and CMOS image sensor devices. For example, the disclosed epitaxial re-growth can increase the effective channel width for an embedded flash memory cell to improve program and erase performances. In addition, the provided subject matter may be used with a vertical transfer gate transistor in a CMOS image sensor (CIS), as provided below.

FIGS. **10A-10B** illustrate some embodiments of a transfer transistor having a vertical transfer gate disposed within a trench having one or more epitaxial layers **1022**.

FIG. **10A** is a plan view of a CMOS image sensor (CIS) comprising a pixel **1000**.

The pixel **1000** comprises a rectangular photodiode region **1002** and a charge collection region **1012**. In some embodiments, the rectangular photodiode region **1002** comprises a semiconductor substrate surrounded by a trench comprising an electrically insulating layer **1004** and a surrounding conductive gate material **1006**. There is an opening **1008** in the trench along one side of the photodiode region **1002**. A transfer transistor having a vertical charge transfer gate **1010** is disposed within the opening **1008**. The transfer transistor having the vertical charge transfer gate **1010** is configured to allow charges that have accumulated within the photodiode region **1002** to be transfer to the charge collection region **1012** (e.g., a floating diffusion node), which is surrounded by a rectangular extension of the trench **202** comprising the electrically insulating layer **1004** and the conductive gate material **1006**. For example, when a positive voltage is applied to the vertical charge transfer gate **1010**, charges are transferred from the photodiode region **1002** to the charge collection region **1012**.

FIG. **10B** illustrates a cross-sectional view **1014** (along line **1013** of FIG. **10A**) of CIS pixel **1000**.

As shown in cross-sectional view **1014**, the vertical charge transfer gate **1010** is disposed within a trench **1016** in a semiconductor substrate **1018**. The vertical charge transfer gate **1010** extends from a top surface of the semiconductor substrate **1018** to a depth **1020** within the semiconductor substrate **1018**.

One or more epitaxial layers **1022** are disposed along interior sidewalls and the bottom surface of the trenches **1016**. In some embodiments, the one or more epitaxial layers **1022** may have a thickness  $t_{ep}$  having a range of between approximately 4 nm and approximately 10 nm. In other embodi-

ments, the thickness  $t_{ep}$  of the one or more epitaxial layers **1022** may be larger or smaller. In various embodiments, the epitaxial layers **1022** may comprise a single-layer epitaxial layer, a multi-layer epitaxial layer comprising a plurality of epitaxial layers (e.g., 2 or more epitaxial layers) with different doping types, or an epitaxial layer having a gradient doping concentration. For example, in some embodiments, the multi-layer epitaxial region may comprise a bi-layer epitaxial layer comprising a first epitaxial layer **1022a** and a second epitaxial layer **1022b**.

The one or more epitaxial layers **1022** provide the vertical transfer gate transistor with a number of advantages. For example, the one or more epitaxial layers **1022** improve the surface roughness of the interior surfaces of the trenches **1016** (e.g., the trench sidewalls and bottom surface) relative to the surface roughness of the semiconductor substrate **1018**. Furthermore, the one or more epitaxial layers **1022** increase the corner rounding profiles (e.g., by between 50% and 200%) at lower corners **1024** and upper corners **1026** of the trenches **1016**.

The electrically insulating layer **1004** is disposed within the trench **1016** at a position over the epitaxial layers **1022** on the bottom surface and sidewalls of the trench **1016**. In some embodiments, the increased corner rounding profiles at lower corners **1024** and upper corners **1026** provide for an angle  $\Phi$  at an interface between the one or more epitaxial layer **1022** and the electrically insulating layer **1004**, which is greater than  $50^\circ$  with respect to the top surface of the semiconductor substrate **1018**. The conductive gate material **1006** is disposed within the trench within the trench **1016** at a position that is separated from the one or more epitaxial layers **1022** by the electrically insulating layer **1004**. In some embodiments, the conductive gate material **1006** may comprise polysilicon, while the electrically insulating layer **1004** may comprise an oxide (e.g.,  $SiO_2$ ).

The conductive gate material **1006** forms a gate structure of the vertical charge transfer gate **1010** that extends to a position overlying the semiconductor substrate **1018**. In some embodiments, the gate structure comprises a silicide layer **1028** disposed over the conductive gate material **1006** of the vertical charge transfer gate **1010**. In some embodiments, the conductive gate material **1006** overlying the semiconductor substrate **1018** may be flanked by sidewall spacers **1030**. In some embodiments, the sidewall spacers **1030** may comprise nitride spacers. One or more metal interconnect layers (not shown) may be located above silicide layer **1028**.

FIG. **11** illustrates a method **1100** of forming a CIS (CMOS image sensor) pixel comprising a transistor device having one or more epitaxial layers formed within a trench comprising a recessed vertical gate.

At **1102**, a semiconductor substrate is provided. In some embodiments, the semiconductor substrate may comprise a plurality of active regions. The active regions comprise source and drain regions that are doped opposite that of a body region or a well region in a surrounding semiconductor substrate.

At **1104**, the semiconductor substrate is selectively etched to form one or more trenches. In some embodiments, a patterned hard mask layer may be formed over the semiconductor substrate prior to etching. The patterned hard mask layer is configured to mask the semiconductor substrate from the etchant, so as to protect un-etched sections the semiconductor substrate and to define a location of the one or more trenches. In some embodiments, the one or more trenches may be formed between adjacent active regions covered by the patterned hard mask layer.



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At **1106**, the interior surfaces of the trenches may be etched back to remove a top portion of the substrate within the trenches. In some embodiments, etching back the interior surfaces of the trenches may remove between approximately 1 nm and approximately 5 nm of material from the interior surfaces of the trenches. In some embodiments, the etch back process may comprise a plasma etching process.

At **1108**, an epitaxial growth is performed to form one or more epitaxial layers onto the sidewalls and bottom surfaces of one or more of the trenches. In some embodiments, the one or more epitaxial layers are formed onto the sidewalls and bottom surfaces of the recessed trenches. The epitaxial layer may be grown by way of a deposition technique (e.g., chemical vapor deposition). For example, in some embodiments, the one or more epitaxial layers may be formed by a LPVCD (low-pressure chemical vapor deposition) process. In other embodiments, the one or more epitaxial layers may be formed by an APCVD (atmospheric pressure chemical vapor deposition) process.

In some embodiments, the etch back process (act **1106**) and the epitaxial growth process (act **1108**) are performed in-situ (as shown by box **1107**), within a same processing chamber (i.e., without removing the semiconductor substrate from the processing chamber).

At **1110**, a vertical transfer gate is formed within one or more of the trenches. In some embodiments, the vertical transfer gate is formed by forming an electrically insulating layer onto the one or more epitaxial layers within the one or more trenches, at **1112**. At **1114**, a conductive gate material is formed onto the electrically insulating layer at a position within the one or more trenches. In other words, the conductive gate material is separated from the substrate and the epitaxial layer(s) by the electrically insulating layer. At **1116**, the conductive gate material is selectively patterned to form a vertical transfer gate extending from within a trench to a position overlying the semiconductor substrate.

Therefore, method **1100** forms epitaxial layers within one or more trenches comprising a vertical transfer gate transistor. By forming the epitaxial layers within one or more trenches comprising a vertical transfer gate, the side-wall roughness and top/bottom corner rounding profile of the trenches are improved relative to that of conventional vertical gate transistors. The smoother side-wall and better corner-rounding profile provide for higher-performance CIS applications.

FIGS. **12-16** illustrate cross-sectional views of various stages of forming a CIS pixel having a transfer transistor with a vertical transfer gate in accordance with some embodiments of the disclosure. Although FIGS. **12-16** are described in relation to method **1100**, it will be appreciated that the structures disclosed in FIGS. **12-16** are not limited to such a method, but instead may stand alone as apparatus.

FIG. **12** illustrates a cross-sectional view **1200** of some embodiments of a semiconductor substrate corresponding to acts **1102-1104**.

As shown in cross-sectional view **1200**, a semiconductor substrate **1018** is selectively exposed to an etchant **1202**. The etchant **1202** is configured to form a plurality of trenches **1204** within the semiconductor substrate **1018**. In some embodiments, the plurality of trenches **1204** are disposed between active regions in the semiconductor substrate **1018**.

In some embodiments, a patterned hard mask layer **1206** is formed onto the semiconductor substrate **1018**. The patterned hard mask layer **1206** comprises a plurality of openings that define the positions of the plurality of trenches **1204**. In some embodiments, the patterned hard mask layer **1206** is formed over active areas of the substrate **1018**. In such embodiments, the patterned hard mask layer **1206** is configured to protect

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the active areas from etchants (e.g., acts **1104-1106**) and from epitaxial processes (e.g., act **1108**). In some embodiments, the patterned hard mask layer **1206** may comprise an oxide or a nitride layer. In some embodiments, the patterned hard mask layer **1206** may have a thickness  $t_{hm}$  having a range of between approximately 10 nm and 100 nm.

FIG. **13** illustrates a cross-sectional view **1300** of some embodiments of a semiconductor substrate corresponding to act **1106**.

As shown in cross-sectional view **1300**, the semiconductor substrate **1018** is exposed to an etchant **1302** that removes a portion of the substrate **1304** from within the interior surfaces of the trenches **1204**. In some embodiments, the etchant **1302** may comprise a dry etchant formed by a dry etching process performed in a processing chamber held at a pressure of between approximately 5 torr and approximately 50 torr and at a temperature of between approximately 400° and approximately 800°, for a time of between approximately 20 seconds and approximately 500 seconds.

The resulting recessed trenches **1306** have a greater width  $w$  and height  $h$  than trenches **1204**. By removing the portion of the substrate **1304**, the etchant **1302** removes unwanted topographical features from the interior surfaces of the trenches **1204**. In some embodiments, the portion of the substrate **1304** removed may have a thickness  $t_{eb}$  having a range of between approximately 1 nm and approximately 5 nm.

FIG. **14** illustrates a cross-sectional view **1400** of some embodiments of a semiconductor substrate corresponding to act **1108**.

As shown in cross-sectional view **1400**, one or more epitaxial layers **1022** are formed within the recessed trenches **1306**. The one or more epitaxial layers **1022** may be formed to a thickness  $t_{ep}$  that is greater than the thickness  $t_{eb}$ . For example, in some embodiments, the one or more epitaxial layers **1022** may have a thickness  $t_{ep}$  having a range of between approximately 5 nm and approximately 15 nm. In some embodiments, the one or more epitaxial layers **1022** may be formed by a deposition process performed in a processing chamber held at a pressure of between approximately 5 torr and approximately 50 torr and at a temperature of between approximately 400° and approximately 800°, for a time of between approximately 20 seconds and approximately 1000 seconds.

In various embodiments, the one or more epitaxial layers **1022** may comprise a single-layer epitaxial layer or bi-layer epitaxial layer. The single layer epitaxial layer may comprise a layer of pure silicon epitaxially grown onto the recessed active regions. The bi-layer epitaxial layer comprises an undoped silicon cap layer grown onto the recessed active regions and a doped silicon layer grown onto the undoped silicon cap layer. The doped silicon layer may have a doping concentration of a boron, a phosphorus, or carbon doping having a range of between approximately  $1E18\text{ cm}^{-3}$  and approximately  $1E21\text{ cm}^{-3}$ .

In some embodiments, after the one or more epitaxial layers **1022** are formed within the recessed trenches **1306**, the hard mask layer **1206** can be removed from the semiconductor substrate **1018**.

FIG. **15** illustrates a cross-sectional view **1500** of some embodiments of a semiconductor substrate corresponding to acts **1012-1014**.

As shown in cross-sectional view **1500**, an electrically insulating layer is formed onto the one or more epitaxial layers **1022** within the trenches **1016**. A conductive gate material **1502** is then deposited over a top surface of the semiconductor substrate **1018** and within the trenches **1016** at positions overlying the electrically insulating layer **1004**. The

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conductive gate material **1502** fills the trenches **1016**. In some embodiments, the conductive gate material **1502** may comprise polysilicon, while the electrically insulating layer **1004** may comprise an oxide (e.g., SiO<sub>2</sub>).

FIG. 16 illustrates a cross-sectional view **1600** of some embodiments of a semiconductor substrate corresponding to act **1016**.

As shown in cross-sectional view **1600**, the conductive gate material **1502** is planarized and selectively patterned to form a patterned conductive gate material **1006**. In some embodiments, the conductive gate material **1502** may be planarized by way of a chemical mechanical polishing (CMP) process and then exposed to an etchant configured to remove unmasked parts of the conductive gate material **1502**. In some embodiments, the etchant comprises a dry etchant used to selectively pattern the conductive gate material **1006** according to a hard mask. In some embodiments, a silicide layer **1028** may be formed over the patterned conductive gate material **1006**. In various embodiments, the silicide layer **1028** may comprise an oxide or silicon nitride material deposited by a deposition technique. In some embodiments, sidewall spacers **1030** may be formed on opposing sides of the patterned conductive gate material **1006** and the silicide layer **1028**. In some embodiments, the sidewall spacers **1030** may be formed by depositing nitride onto the semiconductor substrate **1018** and selectively etching the nitride to form the sidewall spacers **1030**.

Therefore, the present disclosure relates a method, and an associated apparatus, of generating a transistor device having an epitaxial layer disposed over a recessed active region. The epitaxial layer is configured to improve transistor device performance.

In some embodiments, the present disclosure relates to a method of forming a transistor device. The method comprises providing a semiconductor substrate. The method further comprises performing an epitaxial growth to form an epitaxial layer onto the semiconductor substrate. The method further comprises forming an electrically insulating layer onto the epitaxial layer and forming a gate structure onto the electrically insulating layer.

In other embodiments, the present disclosure relates to a method of forming a complementary metal-oxide-semiconductor (CMOS) transistor device. The method comprises providing a semiconductor substrate having a plurality of original active regions, and forming an isolation structure between adjacent original active regions. The method further comprises etching the original active regions to remove a portion of the original active regions and to thereby form recessed active regions that have a top surface below the isolation structure. The method further comprises performing a selective epitaxial growth, in-situ with the etching the original active regions, to form an epitaxial layer onto the recessed active regions, but not onto the isolation structure. The method further comprises forming a gate dielectric layer having a substantially uniform thickness over the epitaxial layer.

In yet other embodiments, the present disclosure relates to a method of forming a vertical gate transfer transistor. The method comprises providing a semiconductor substrate. The method further comprises selectively etching the semiconductor substrate to form a trench. The method further comprises performing a selective epitaxial growth to form an epitaxial layer onto sidewalls and a bottom surface of the trench. The method further comprises forming an electrically insulating layer within the trench onto the epitaxial layer, and forming a conductive gate material within the plurality of trenches onto the electrically insulating layer, wherein the

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conductive gate material extends outward from the trench to a position overlying the semiconductor substrate

The foregoing outlines features of several embodiments so that those skilled in the art may better understand the aspects of the present disclosure. Those skilled in the art should appreciate that they may readily use the present disclosure as a basis for designing or modifying other processes and structures for carrying out the same purposes and/or achieving the same advantages of the embodiments introduced herein. Those skilled in the art should also realize that such equivalent constructions do not depart from the spirit and scope of the present disclosure, and that they may make various changes, substitutions, and alterations herein without departing from the spirit and scope of the present disclosure.

What is claimed is:

1. A method of forming a transistor device, comprising:
  - providing a semiconductor substrate;
  - performing an epitaxial growth to form an epitaxial layer onto original active regions of the semiconductor substrate;
  - selectively etching the semiconductor substrate to form one or more trenches disposed between the original active regions;
  - forming a first electrically insulating material into the one or more trenches to form isolation structures between adjacent ones of the original active regions;
  - forming a second electrically insulating layer onto the epitaxial layer; and
  - forming a gate structure over the second electrically insulating layer by forming a gate dielectric layer comprising the second electrically insulating layer over the epitaxial layer and by forming a gate electrode over the gate dielectric layer.
2. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
  - etching the semiconductor substrate to remove a portion of the semiconductor substrate and to thereby form one or more recessed regions; and
  - forming the epitaxial layer onto the one or more recessed regions.
3. The method of claim 2, wherein etching the semiconductor substrate and performing the epitaxial growth to form the epitaxial layer are performed in-situ without removing the semiconductor substrate from a processing chamber.
4. The method of claim 1, wherein the epitaxial layer has a top surface comprising a convex curvature, such that the top surface is higher at a center of the epitaxial layer and lower at outer edges of the epitaxial layer.
5. The method of claim 1, wherein the epitaxial growth comprises a selective epitaxial growth process that forms the epitaxial layer over the original active regions, but that does not form the epitaxial layer onto the isolation structures.
6. The method of claim 5, wherein the epitaxial growth is performed using processing gases including hydrochloric acid (HCl).
7. The method of claim 1, wherein the gate dielectric layer is deposited onto sidewalls of the epitaxial layer at a (111) facet having an angle about 54.7° with respect to a horizontal plane.
8. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
  - selectively etching the semiconductor substrate to form the one or more trenches;
  - forming a third electrically insulating material onto a bottom and sidewalls of the one or more trenches; and
  - forming a conductive gate material onto the third electrically insulating material at a position within the one or more trenches.

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9. The method of claim 1, wherein the epitaxial layer is doped with a boron dopant, a phosphorus dopant, or a carbon dopant.

10. The method of claim 1, wherein the epitaxial layer comprises a multi-layer epitaxial layer having a plurality of epitaxial layers with different doping concentrations. 5

11. A method of forming a complementary metal-oxide-semiconductor (CMOS) transistor device, comprising:

providing a semiconductor substrate having a plurality of original active regions; 10

forming an isolation structure between adjacent ones of the plurality of original active regions;

etching the original active regions to remove a portion of the plurality of original active regions and to thereby form recessed active regions that have a top surface below the isolation structure; 15

performing a selective epitaxial growth, in-situ with the etching the plurality of original active regions, to form an epitaxial layer onto the recessed active regions, but not onto the isolation structure; and 20

forming a gate dielectric layer having a substantially uniform thickness over the epitaxial layer.

12. The method of claim 11, wherein the epitaxial layer has a top surface comprising a convex curvature, such that the top surface is higher at a center of the epitaxial layer and lower at outer edges of the epitaxial layer. 25

13. The method of claim 11, wherein the epitaxial growth is performed using processing gases including hydrochloric acid (HCl).

14. The method of claim 11, wherein the gate dielectric layer is deposited onto sidewalls of the epitaxial layer at a (111) facet having an angle about 54.7° with respect to a horizontal plane. 30

15. The method of claim 11, wherein the epitaxial layer is doped with a boron dopant, a phosphorus dopant or a carbon dopant. 35

16. The method of claim 11, wherein the epitaxial layer comprises a multi-layer epitaxial layer having a plurality of epitaxial layers with different doping concentrations.

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17. A method of forming a vertical gate transfer transistor, comprising:

providing a semiconductor substrate;

selectively etching the semiconductor substrate to form a trench;

performing a selective epitaxial growth to form an epitaxial layer onto sidewalls and a bottom surface of the trench; forming an electrically insulating layer within the trench onto the epitaxial layer; and

forming a conductive gate material within the trench over the electrically insulating layer, so that the conductive gate material is separated from the epitaxial layer by the electrically insulating layer, wherein the conductive gate material extends outward from the trench to a position overlying the semiconductor substrate.

18. The method of claim 17, wherein the epitaxial layer is doped with a boron dopant, a phosphorus dopant, or a carbon dopant.

19. The method of claim 17, wherein etching the semiconductor substrate and performing the epitaxial growth to form the epitaxial layer are performed in-situ without removing the semiconductor substrate from a processing chamber.

20. A method of forming a transistor device, comprising: providing a semiconductor substrate;

etching the semiconductor substrate to remove a portion of the semiconductor substrate and to thereby form one or more recessed regions;

performing an epitaxial growth to form an epitaxial layer onto the one or more recessed regions within the semiconductor substrate;

forming an electrically insulating layer onto the epitaxial layer;

forming a gate structure onto the electrically insulating layer; and

wherein etching the semiconductor substrate and performing the epitaxial growth to form the epitaxial layer are performed in-situ without removing the semiconductor substrate from a processing chamber.

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